

## Surveying in Wisconsin, in 1837 /

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### **SURVEYING IN WISCONSIN, IN 1837. BY FRANKLIN HATHEWAY.<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Franklin Hatheway, author of this sketch, was born at Rome, Oneida County, N.Y., July 12, 1818, of Vermont parents. His great-grandfather, Simeon Hatheway, fought, together with his seven sons, under General Stark in the battle of Bennington. Later in the war, one of these sons, Joshua (grandfather of our author), was one of the "Green Mountain Boys" under Ethan Allan, and saw much active service; after the war, he entered Yale College and graduated therefrom in 1787. Removing in 1795 to Fort Stanwix (now Rome, N.Y.), he was elected first treasurer of Oneida County, and was postmaster at Rome from 1808 to 1833. During the War of 1812–15, he was in the military service, and at one time was commandant at Sackett's Harbor. By appointment from Gov. DeWitt Clinton, he was the first to break ground for the Erie Canal (July 4, 1817). His wife was a daughter of John Haynes Lord, of Hartford, Conn., a lineal descendant of the John Haynes who was governor of Massachusetts in 1635, and later governor of Connecticut (at intervals between 1639 and 1653). The oldest son of Joshua was the father of our author; for many years he was one of the leading merchants of Rome, and succeeded his father as postmaster, holding office from 1833 to 1849; he was also treasurer of Oneida County for ten years. In October, 1817, he married Zeruiah Cleveland, whose father was a brother of the grandfather of ex-President Cleveland. Their son Franklin first came to Wisconsin when 17 years of age (August, 1835), in company with his uncle, Joshua Hatheway. Landing in Green Bay, they were present during the great government land sale there, in September. Returning to Rome in July, 1836, Franklin was at once engaged on surveys for the Genessee Valley Canal. The summer of 1837 he spent as related in his sketch below. Upon completing his work at Madison and Green Bay, he returned to Rome to recuperate his health, spending the following winter and spring in his father's store and in the principal charge of the Rome post-office. In August, 1838, he commenced work in the

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engineering corps of the Utica & Syracuse Railroad; and June 27, 1839, went to Syracuse upon the first train of cars to pass through central New York. In the spring of 1843, he returned to Milwaukee, forming a real-estate partnership with his uncle, Joshua Hatheway, which continued until the autumn of 1845; he then spent a year and a half at Cleveland, as a bank official, and in the spring of 1847 was called to Chicago, where he has since resided.— Ed.

My uncle, Joshua Hatheway, came out from the East in 1833 or 1834, being then associated with the late Albert G. Ellis, as a surveyor. In the early summer of 1835, he went to Washington, and secured a contract from the general land office to survey and subdivide into sections, townships Nos. 1, 2, 3, N., ranges 20, 21, 22, 23, E., in the extreme southeast corner of what is now Wisconsin—but then, a part of Michigan Territory. One or two families had located at the mouth of Pike Creek (now the City of Kenosha), and perhaps a dozen families at the mouth of Root River (now Racine); but besides these few residents on the lake shore, there was not a single farmer or farm house in the entire

Franklin Hatheway (From photograph taken upon his eightieth birthday.)

391 district. It was arranged to put two surveying parties in the field;—one led by Mr. Hatheway, and the other by John Banister (afterwards a prominent citizen of Fond du Lac). The entire party—numbering with the cook and the packer ten men, of whom I was one—were to occupy one tent during the progress of the work. We left Milwaukee on Christmas Day (1835), on foot, and before the end of the year were actively at work. Two months sufficed to complete the survey; about the first of March, 1836, a portion of the party was dismissed, and the others spent about a month in surveying and laying out the future city of Racine, under the lead of David Giddings, who was a member of the Territorial house of representatives (1840–42), and later a member of the first constitutional convention. Mr. Giddings now owns and lives on the celebrated “Macy” farm of 400 acres, near Fond du Lac, the only known survivor (March, 1898), except the writer, of those surveying parties. We then returned to Milwaukee, and spent the summer in laying out several additions to

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the village site; the most prominent being "Walker's Point Addition," on the south bank of Menomonee River, from its junction with the Milwaukee River westward, for half a mile or more.

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In this work we were assisted by Daniel Wells, Jr. (now of Milwaukee), and having found a small, deserted log hut standing on the extreme point where the two rivers met, we took possession; it was the only habitation in the entire subdivision.

I spent the following winter at my Eastern home, with my parents, but again turned my steps westward in the spring of 1837, and landed at Green Bay. After a few weeks, I joined my uncle in Milwaukee, where I had temporary work in fitting and joining together the sheets which compose the first map of the Territory of Wisconsin, and writing in the names of the several counties. It seems that when the map was engraved, the names and boundaries of the counties had not been legally established; or, that the engravers had omitted an important part of their work, which it became necessary to supply; and so this work of completing the map came to my hand.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Topographical Map of Wisconsin Territory, published by Samuel Morrison and Elisha Dwelle, of the surveyor general's office, Cincinnati, and Joshua Hatheway, of Milwaukee, 1837. This map embraces only the lands south and east of Wisconsin and Fox rivers—all that had, up to that time, been purchased from the Indians.— Ed.

While thus engaged, I learned that James Duane Dory (afterwards Territorial governor), who was then living at Green Bay, desired to engage a surveyor to lay out the city of Madison, which the Territorial Legislature had, at its recent session, designated as the future capital. I decided to return to the Bay and apply for the job, and was informed that the county surveyors from Brown County and from Mineral Point<sup>2</sup> had both attempted to do the work, and were, for some cause not known to me, obliged to abandon it. This did not prevent me from making personal application to Mr. Doty, as I had a good compass

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and thought I knew how to use it. He evidently thought that my youth and inexperience precluded all hope of success, where older and wiser heads had failed; but I finally

2 Moses M. Strong was the Mineral Point surveyor. See *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, x, pp. 86–88, for the story of his experiences.— Ed.

393 cured from him the privilege of attempting the survey on condition that, in case of failure to complete it, I should make no charge for my time or expenses.

My arrangements for the journey were soon completed, and I started on horseback, with only a change of underwear in my saddle-bag, and compass on my arm, for the scene of my future labors. The only route open for travel was the military road to Fort Winnebago, passing around the east and south sides of Lake Winnebago, and following the general course of the Upper Fox River, to the fort; thence by the Mineral Point road south, to about the latitude of Fourth Lake; thence east across the country, to the site of the future capital. This journey—partly alone, on horseback, and from the Brothertown Reservation to Fort Winnebago, about eighty miles on foot, with two Indian boys to carry provisions, blankets, etc.—occupied a full week.

Excluding the improvements on the reservation, there were but two houses between DePere and Fort Winnebago — one at Wrightstown, another at Fond du Lac. A few miles east of the fort we passed a lone man plowing with a span of horses; his covered wagon, in which he slept, standing by the roadside. He had located on the north side of the road, in the open prairie, and was probably the first farmer to break ground west of Lake Winnebago.

On reaching the site of Madison, the first week was spent in locating and establishing the section lines that meet and cross in the center of the Capitol Park and follow the streets and avenues that diverge from its four corners. From these lines as a base, the sides of the square, and their exact location and length, were to be determined; upon their accuracy, all the work of the survey depended, and in the prosecution of this preliminary

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work I met with the same difficulty that had baffled the skill of the old county surveyors. After exhausting every expedient at my command, in fruitless efforts to run a straight line with the compass, I was forced to the conclusion that it could not be done; for repeated trials made with the utmost care, on a 394 north-and-south line, showed that lines run on the same course, as indicated by the needle, crossed each other at every attempt. It was supposed that local magnetic attraction of some sort deflected the needle at various points, and prevented its normal action, and it therefore could not be depended upon for accurate work. I was convinced that, unless some means could be found to neutralize the effects thus produced, the work could not go on; and that for want of the requisite knowledge and skill, and proper instruments, I would be compelled to score another failure.

There was, at that time, a gang of masons and stonecutters on the ground, at work getting out material for the foundation of the capitol, which was to occupy the center of the park. The precise location of this center was yet to be determined from the boundary lines, which were first to be accurately and definitely established by the surveyor; for this reason, my failure was certain to embarrass and delay, and perhaps stop, their work, and cause loss to the contractors as well.

It was therefore with a heavy heart that I reported to the commissioner in charge, Augustus A. Bird, my inability to make the survey, and my intention to start for Green Bay on the following day. While explaining to him the obstacles in my way, it fortunately happened that a traveller who had stopped at our boarding house for the night, on his way across the country, heard our conversation; at its conclusion, he approached me, and, asking a few questions relative to the work in hand, suggested a mode of operation which at once seemed to remove all difficulties. It would take too much time and space to explain in detail the *modus operandi* ; suffice it to say, that the plan recommended was adopted, was entirely successful, and proved to be so accurate that, as the work progressed, any error in course or distance was at once discovered and corrected. The next morning, the traveller (whose name I did not learn) resumed his journey, and I never again saw him.

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With a cheerful, thankful heart, I began operations in the field, and before the noon hour arrived had the boundary 395 lines of the Capitol Park located and staked out, and my work fairly started.

Soon after this, the postmaster, John Catlin, was suddenly called to New York, and it became necessary for him to appoint a deputy to act during his absence. Having served in that capacity under my father, in my native town, I was familiar with the laws and regulations of the post-office department, so I was duly appointed, and found no difficulty in conducting the affairs of the office during Catlin's protracted absence. As I now remember, we had mails brought on horseback from Milwaukee, Mineral Point, and Green Bay, once or twice a week. The post-office consisted of small case of pigeon holes, closed by doors, standing on one end of the counter, in the only store then in operation. This was store, saloon, and post-office, all in one, and was the lounging place of the workmen after finishing the day's labor. The building, a one-story frame, without lath or plaster, was, as I afterwards learned, built and owned by Simeon Mills, and was one of the four buildings then standing—the other three being: a log house south of the park, near the bank of Third Lake; a large one-and-a-half story frame boarding house and tavern, the entire upper floor being one bare room, with rows of beds on each side, under the eaves, and a passage-way through the middle, barely high enough to allow a man to stand erect; and a small frame office, for the use of Commissioner Bird; these comprised all the improvements of which Madison could then boast.

The ground between Third and Fourth lakes was covered with a moderately heavy growth of timber, and an undergrowth of hazel and other bushes, quite dense in some places. In proceeding with the survey, it became necessary to clear away every thing that obstructed the sight along the lines to be located and measured; So that the work required much more time to complete than would have been necessary on an open prairie; but nothing occurred to check our progress until the area covered by the plat given me to work from had all been surveyed and properly staked off.

It was about September 15 when I finished this work, and commenced to explore the country lying between Madison and the head of Lake Winnebago, a distance of about sixty-five miles, through an unknown and uninhabited region. Governor Doty and his associates were anxious to avoid the long detour via Fort Winnebago, to reach the capital from the north, and engaged me to examine the country along the most direct route between those points, and report on the feasibility of opening a wagon road across the intervening country. Accordingly, I purchased an Indian pony, and placing my saddlebags, blankets, and provisions on his back, struck out with my two assistants. We took a northeasterly course, and soon reached the open prairie, which was dotted here and there with groves of burr oak, in the distance resembling cultivated orchards. The country through which we passed was chiefly a high, rolling prairie, having a rich soil, covered with rank vegetation, but destitute of living streams. A long, hot summer had dried up the sloughs and the few water-courses that crossed our path, and we suffered severely from thirst. The first night out, we camped in a thicket of hazel bushes, and after dark moistened our parched throats with dew gathered from the leaves. Our provisions, consisting of rusty pork and hard tack, were bad enough, but the best then to be had in Madison; finding nothing better than stagnant water to drink, only added to our discomfort.

On the afternoon of the second day, having reached the vicinity of Fox Lake, I was taken violently ill, and for a few hours doubted whether I should ever get up again; but towards noon of the next day, I mounted my horse, and taking a westerly course, after six or eight hours travel we reached Fort Winnebago just at night fall. Here I found a hearty welcome in the comfortable quarters of Lieut. William Root<sup>1</sup> (a son of Gen. Erastus Root, of New York) and all needful attention and restoratives; but lacking strength to continue the work in hand, the next day I sent my two men with the horse to Green Bay, there to await my arrival,

1 Of the 5th Regiment.— Ed.

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397 and accepted an invitation given me by the surgeon of the post, to accompany him on a trip down the Fox River by boat.

Two Mackinac boats, laden with furs for the American Fur Co., were hourly expected from the Upper Wisconsin River, and similar boats were lying in Fox River, opposite the fort, waiting to receive their cargoes; these had to be transferred on the backs of Indians and half-breeds, over a land portage about a mile and a quarter in length. Several days were consumed in this work; but after a week's sojourn at the fort as the guest of Lieutenant Root, I went on board one of the boats, with the surgeon, and two soldiers detailed to serve him on his journey, and we were soon floating lazily down the river.

From Portage to Lake Winnebago the river wound its tortuous way through broad rice marshes, which in many places extended as far as the eye could reach on either side; but occasionally the channel ran close to high points of land that jutted into the marshy waste. No habitations were seen at any place on its banks, but myriads of blackbirds fed on the wild rice, and numberless ducks and geese covered the open waters.

Passing from the river into Lake Winnebago, at the site of the future city of Oshkosh,—then covered with a heavy growth of timber and uninhabited,<sup>1</sup> — we made a pleasant run down the lake, and entered the Lower Fox River, where our progress was impeded by frequent rapids and falls, at each of which it was necessary to unload the boats and carry the cargoes overland to deep water below. This trip consumed about a week's time. We reached Green Bay September 29, where I found my men anxiously awaiting my arrival. After promptly reporting to Governor Doty the

<sup>1</sup> Webster Stanley set up a ferry at Coon's Point, Oshkosh, in July, 1836, thus becoming the founder of that city. The following month, he was joined by the Gallup brothers (Henry and Amos). In 1837, George Wright and his son William, David Evans, Chester Ford, and Joseph Jackson arrived and became permanent settlers. All these were in Oshkosh (then called "Athens") at the time of our author's visit.— Ed.



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398 results of our trip so far as accomplished, they were paid off, and started for home via Fond du Lac and Fox Lake, in order to complete the examination which my sudden illness had interrupted.

The governor was so well pleased with my success that he offered me a winter's work in surveying and laying out the "City of the Four Lakes," which was projected on a grand scale, and intended to occupy a magnificent site on the northwesterly side of Fourth Lake, opposite the capital.<sup>1</sup> It was a tempting offer, the pay being liberal, and the advantages to me all that could have been desired; but its acceptance involved the hardships and exposure of a winter campaign, with only a tent for shelter, and well knowing all that this involved, I reluctantly declined his urgent request. I was still suffering from the effects of the late attack of illness, and felt that my strength was not equal to the labor which the undertaking would impose upon me. The panic of 1837 put an end to the proposed "City of the Four Lakes," as it also did to hundreds of other speculative schemes which had a splendid existence on paper, but which, owing to the hard times that followed, never materialized.

<sup>1</sup> At what is now known as Livesey's Springs.— Ed.

Were an intelligent and educated stranger, who knew nothing of the history of Wisconsin, now to make a tour through the state, examining in detail its cities, towns, railroads, factories and farms, and then be told that all the results of human enterprise, labor, and skill which he had witnessed had been accomplished during the last sixty years, he might be pardoned if he regarded the statement as a gross exaggeration; nevertheless, it would be but a simple recital of a marvelous fact.